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**Missouri's Labor Market Conditions Continue to Improve**  
***Unemployment Rate Falls to Lowest Level Since July 2001***

Missouri's unemployment rate dropped to its lowest level since July of 2001 in February and employment increased slightly, providing further indications that economic conditions may be improving, according to the Missouri Department of Economic Development.

The state's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell by four-tenths of a point from January to 4.7 percent. This is in addition to a four-tenths of a point drop that occurred in January. The February 2003 rate is also well below the 5.4 percent rate from February of 2002.

About 138,000 Missourians were estimated to have been jobless, on a seasonally adjusted basis, a decrease of more than 26,000 since December. Missouri's unemployment is more than a full percentage point below the national seasonally adjusted unemployment rate, which was at 5.8 percent in February.

The unadjusted rate also fell in February, decreasing six-tenths of a point from 5.7 percent in January to 5.1 percent in February.

"We continue to receive good news about Missouri's unemployment rate. In January our rate fell to its lowest level in 13 months and in February the rate is at its lowest level in 18 months," said DED Director Joseph L. Driskill. "This is yet another reason for us to be optimistic that Missouri's economic climate is improving and that the national recession's brutal grip on our economy is starting to ease.

"Economists pay attention to many economic indicators, but the unemployment rate is one of the most important because it shows the relative strength of our economy. While some observers have chosen to focus just on changes in the total size of our workforce, I think it is even more important to track our unemployment rate. It is clear that Missourians are getting jobs at greater rates, going to work, and keeping their jobs to support their families. It also shows that we are continuing to have a solid economic climate for job growth. We are hopeful this is a sign of even better things to come."

Non-farm payroll employment increased in February, the first seasonally adjusted increase since last September. Employment increased by 7,500 to 2,644,300 jobs. Part of the increase came from educational services (both public and private) returning to a more normal level following semester breaks in January. Employment in professional and business services was up by 2,300, in educational and health services by 1,100, and in other services by 4,600, on a seasonally adjusted basis. Government employment, including public schools and colleges was up by 5,500 over the month.

In addition, January employment numbers have been revised upward as more complete data have become available. Higher levels were reported in construction; trade, transportation and utilities; education and health services; and government. Overall, the revised estimate of employment is about 7,000 jobs higher than the preliminary estimate.

Compared to February 2002, total non-farm payroll employment has decreased by 46,800 jobs. (These comparisons are made using not seasonally adjusted data, to provide the maximum industry detail.) Industries continuing to report the largest decreases include: professional and business services (-16,300), manufacturing (-14,400), state government (-8,900), construction (-6,700), telecommunications (-4,700) and transportation (-3,800). However, there are a number of industries that have higher employment than in February 2002. These include retail trade (+3,700), credit intermediation (+1,100), leisure and hospitality (+2,200), health care (+2,500), and a group of "other services" that includes religious, grant making, civic and professional organizations (+2,900).

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MISSOURI UNEMPLOYMENT RATES (Not seasonally adjusted)  
FOR METROPOLITAN STATISTICAL AREAS (MSAs), LABOR MARKET AREAS (LMAs), AND COUNTIES  
CURRENT MONTH (FEB. 2003), PREVIOUS TWO MONTHS (DEC. 2002 AND JAN. 2003), AND YEAR AGO (FEB. 2002)

	FEB 2003	JAN 2003	DEC 2002	FEB 2002		FEB 2003	JAN 2003	DEC 2002	FEB 2002
U.S. (not seasonally adjusted)	6.4	6.5	5.7	6.1	Atchison	3.4	3.6	2.8	3.9
MISSOURI	5.1	5.7	5.4	5.8	Audrain	5.4	5.9	5.2	5.0
ST. LOUIS MSA	5.2	5.7	5.5	5.6	Barton	4.0	4.6	4.3	4.3
Franklin	6.0	6.4	5.9	6.2	Bates	6.8	8.3	7.8	7.4
Jefferson	5.5	6.1	5.5	5.9	Benton	8.1	9.4	7.9	10.0
Lincoln	6.3	6.6	6.0	6.4	Caldwell	7.9	8.6	7.7	8.4
St. Charles	3.6	4.0	3.9	4.0	Carroll	5.5	6.4	5.9	6.2
St. Louis County	4.1	4.6	4.6	4.6	Cedar	6.6	7.6	7.9	6.6
Warren	6.5	6.8	5.8	6.4	Chariton	5.9	7.3	7.0	7.2
St. Louis City	7.6	8.6	9.1	9.1	Clark	7.9	9.0	7.9	8.8
KANSAS CITY MSA	5.4	5.7	5.6	5.5	Cooper	3.9	4.6	4.5	5.2
Cass	4.4	5.1	4.8	4.8	Crawford	7.8	8.5	7.4	7.9
Clay	3.8	4.2	4.3	4.0	Dade	4.0	4.5	4.4	5.6
Clinton	5.7	5.8	5.7	5.9	Dallas	5.9	6.7	6.7	8.2
Jackson	5.6	6.3	6.6	6.1	Daviess	5.9	6.2	5.6	6.6
Lafayette	4.6	5.4	4.9	6.1	DeKalb	5.7	6.2	5.3	6.7
Platte	3.4	4.0	4.2	4.2	Dent	7.3	8.7	8.0	8.6
Ray	5.0	5.4	5.2	5.2	Douglas	9.9	11.2	10.3	13.5
SPRINGFIELD MSA	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.6	Dunklin	8.1	9.1	8.4	8.9
Christian	5.3	5.9	5.0	5.3	Gasconade	5.8	6.5	6.2	6.7
Greene	3.4	3.8	3.8	4.2	Gentry	3.5	3.7	3.5	6.4
Webster	4.1	4.4	5.0	6.2	Grundy	5.0	5.8	5.0	5.9
JOPLIN MSA	4.7	5.3	5.5	4.9	Harrison	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.5
Jasper	4.4	5.0	4.9	5.0	Henry	7.4	6.8	6.4	7.3
Newton	5.2	5.9	6.5	4.8	Hickory	9.4	10.6	8.9	9.6
COLUMBIA MSA	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.2	Holt	5.8	6.2	4.6	5.5
Boone	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.2	Howard	4.2	4.8	4.8	5.8
ST. JOSEPH MSA	5.7	6.2	5.7	6.6	Iron	8.6	9.7	9.7	9.8
Andrew	4.9	5.4	5.1	5.9	Johnson	3.4	4.1	3.8	4.1
Buchanan	5.9	6.4	5.9	6.7	Knox	4.1	4.1	3.6	4.6
ADAIR-SCHUYLER LMA	3.7	3.8	3.1	4.4	Laclede	9.0	6.1	5.7	7.2
Adair	3.2	3.3	2.8	3.8	Lewis	5.2	5.6	5.1	5.2
Schuyler	6.6	7.0	5.1	8.2	Linn	7.6	10.8	10.4	6.8
BUTLER-CARTER-RIPLEY LMA	5.5	6.2	6.3	6.2	Livingston	4.5	4.4	4.1	4.3
Butler	5.1	5.8	5.8	5.5	McDonald	5.7	6.1	13.1	5.4
Carter	6.8	7.4	7.4	8.9	Macon	6.2	7.5	6.2	8.0
Ripley	6.1	7.2	7.7	7.6	Madison	8.0	8.8	8.6	10.2
CAMDEN-MILLER LMA	8.8	10.6	8.5	10.8	Mercer	7.1	7.4	7.2	5.6
Camden	8.5	10.4	8.3	10.4	Monroe	7.4	8.0	7.3	7.5
Miller	9.2	11.0	8.9	11.5	Montgomery	6.9	7.2	6.4	6.7
CAPE GIRARDEAU-SCOTT-NEW MADRID LMA	5.2	6.0	5.7	6.1	Morgan	8.6	9.8	8.4	10.5
Bollinger	6.9	7.0	6.0	10.1	Nodaway	2.1	2.5	2.1	2.6
Cape Girardeau	3.5	4.3	3.9	4.3	Ozark	6.9	7.7	6.8	8.8
Mississippi	7.3	8.1	8.7	9.6	Pemiscot	10.6	11.7	10.8	10.4
New Madrid	11.1	12.7	11.0	9.4	Perry	3.3	3.8	3.1	3.9
Scott	4.8	5.6	5.7	6.1	Pettis	5.6	6.2	5.6	7.6
COLE-CALLAWAY-MONITEAU LMA	3.4	4.0	3.6	3.5	Pike	5.4	5.6	5.1	5.8
Callaway	3.8	4.3	3.9	3.9	Polk	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.4
Cole	2.8	3.4	3.0	2.9	Pulaski	4.5	5.2	4.9	6.3
Moniteau	3.9	4.6	4.1	3.7	Putnam	7.9	7.8	5.9	5.7
Osage	4.4	5.4	5.2	5.3	Randolph	5.2	5.4	4.6	6.4
HOWELL-OREGON-SHANNON LMA	5.3	5.9	5.7	6.2	Reynolds	10.8	12.3	11.1	10.5
Howell	4.8	5.5	5.3	5.8	St. Clair	7.0	6.7	6.0	6.4
Oregon	4.1	4.4	4.4	6.1	Ste. Genevieve	5.7	6.4	5.3	6.8
Shannon	8.9	9.5	8.9	8.2	Saline	5.0	5.3	5.4	6.6
LAWRENCE-BARRY LMA	5.2	5.9	5.4	5.7	Scotland	5.4	5.0	4.3	7.2
Barry	5.4	6.4	6.1	5.9	Shelby	6.5	7.4	5.9	9.4
Lawrence	5.0	5.4	4.8	5.5	Stoddard	6.6	7.6	7.0	8.1
MARION-RALLS LMA	5.6	5.7	5.2	6.3	Stone	19.9	22.8	8.6	24.1
Marion	5.3	5.4	4.9	6.2	Sullivan	12.0	13.3	8.0	4.0
Ralls	6.4	6.3	6.0	6.4	Taney	17.2	20.0	5.2	21.8
PHELPS-MARIES LMA	3.6	4.1	3.8	4.2	Texas	8.4	8.8	8.1	9.0
Maries	3.9	4.9	4.5	5.5	Vernon	4.4	5.0	4.8	5.0
Phelps	3.5	4.0	3.6	3.9	Wayne	12.1	13.2	12.7	14.4
ST. FRANCOIS-WASHINGTON LMA	7.9	9.1	8.5	9.1	Worth	4.2	4.8	3.5	8.3
St. Francois	6.9	8.2	7.9	8.1	Wright	6.8	7.4	7.8	11.2
Washington	10.4	11.3	10.1	11.6					

NOTE: DATA FOR COUNTIES WITHIN MSAs/LMAs ARE DISAGGREGATED FROM MSA/LMA TOTALS.

NOTE: SUBSTATE AREA DATA FOR 2002 HAVE BEEN REVISED BUT ARE PROVISIONAL: NOT YET OFFICIAL AND SUBJECT TO CHANGE.

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